

Collectors flip over the latest Lincoln cent goof

By Roger Boye

Yet another error-coin variety has turned up in circulation, this time a 1983 cent with double lettering on the tails side.

The oddity may be the rarest Lincoln cent goof since 1972, when Uncle Sam made a similar double-die piece that retails today for at least \$220 in uncirculated condition. Each 1983 error sports two distinct reverse designs roughly one-fiftieth of an inch apart, a doubling that most people see clearly without using magnification.

In mid-February, hobby specialist Alan Herbert said collectors had discovered at least 50 error cents so far, judging from reports he had received. Many of those coins have turned up in Pennsylvania and Florida, although perhaps the luckiest finder so far is an Ohio man who also had taken a rare 1982 no-mint-mark dime out of circulation several months ago.

Government machines created the doubling when they improperly produced just one of the thousands of dies used to make 1983 cents at the Philadelphia Mint [cents from there do not carry mint marks]. A hub—the tool used to manufacture dies—slipped slightly as it impressed the Lincoln Memorial design into the now-famous die.

Herbert said it's too soon to estimate how many of the error coins were struck or their potential market value. Normally, a Lincoln cent die makes at least 750,000 coins, although Herbert said there's evidence that workers may have removed the "doubled die" from service after a relatively short run.

Of course, the market value will fluctuate with the number of coins that turns up in circulation. Several days ago, a dealer told Herbert that an "about uncirculated" specimen might fetch \$175 at an auction.

Incidentally, the doubling appears only on the tails side of the 1983 error cents, unlike the 1972 doubled-die cent and an even rarer 1955 specimen, which have doubling on just the heads side. Coins with major minting errors on the reverse usually generate less enthusiasm in the hobby than pieces with similar mistakes on the heads side.

Herbert cautioned collectors not to confuse the rare doubled-die cent with a much more common minting error called "machine doubling." On the rare coins, every letter on the tails side is doubled with two distinct, raised images, and the heads side is normal.

● The British half penny will soon get the ax, ending more than 10 centuries of service as a coin of the realm.

British citizens shun half pennies because of their nominal value, and officials complain that the coins cost more to make than they are worth as legal tender. The government says it will take all half pennies from circulation by the end of the year, according to the Wall Street Journal.